

RSA Strategy 2026-30

Shaping regional development,
mobilising regional research



Chair's foreword

Last year the Regional Studies Association (RSA) celebrated its 60th Anniversary. This important landmark prompted us to reflect on how much we have achieved and how much we have developed as an association since 1965. The RSA is now a truly global organisation that champions the full range of regional studies scholarship in over 80 countries. Scientific excellence underpins everything that we do as we support our members to produce scholarship that creates lasting public value.

As Chair, it is my honour to present our 2026-30 Strategy, which showcases our values and represents the views and aspirations of our members and wider community. Much needs to be done to realise these ambitions but valuable work is already taking place and I speak on behalf of the Regional Studies Association Board and trustees when I say that we are all committed to making it a success.

Professor Sarah Ayres, FAcSS, FeRSA
Chair, Regional Studies Association
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Shaping regional development, mobilising regional research

The RSA is an international, interdisciplinary community for regional research, development and policy. We:

- advance regional studies by supporting regional researchers and disseminating regional research; and
- demonstrate the value of regional research to society by connecting research evidence to policy and practice.

Purpose

To advance regional research and enable its use for the benefit of people and places across the world.

Vision

For policies and practices affecting regional development to be shaped by robust research evidence.



We value:

Regional thinking – because a focus on place is integral to effective public policy and practice

Interdisciplinary research – because working with integrity across disciplines is necessary to tackle complex global and regional challenges

Community and collaboration – because working together across borders and boundaries nurtures individuals and fosters insight to regional issues

Openness and inclusion – because inclusion brings diverse perspectives and creates equity within the regional studies community and beyond

Social and environmental responsibility – because our knowledge and actions should contribute to a more just and sustainable future for all

Our strategic priorities 2026-30 are to:

1. Champion high-quality regional research
2. Strengthen regional research and knowledge networks
3. Grow and diversify the regional studies community
4. Contribute to a just and sustainable future

Strategic priority 1:

Champion high-quality regional research

What RSA members tell us:

- Scientific excellence and interdisciplinarity underpin the legitimacy of the RSA and the value of regional research. Our support for new knowledge creation through RSA research grants, and the roles played by RSA events and publications in sharing knowledge, are viewed very positively. Nevertheless, students and Early Career Researchers (ECRs) describe the challenge of developing researcher identities and establishing themselves professionally within such a diverse, interdisciplinary field. The availability of regional data is another issue, especially for those early in their careers, in the global south and in countries lacking regional statistics.
- Members acknowledge the importance of foundational, critical and problem-posing research to the development of the field. However, the RSA's record in connecting research to policy and practice is highly valued and members regard working with and influencing policymaking at all stages - from ideation to implementation - and at scales from the local to international, as a key priority for the RSA. Members wish to see the RSA strengthen its role as an advocate for regional studies and to better communicate the importance of regional research to decision-makers in higher education and public policy.
- This poses challenges to the Association: to identify the role of regional research in addressing pressing societal questions, such as inequality, digital transition and the implications of climate change for cities and regions; to find ways to synthesise and communicate the work being done across the community; and to bring policymakers, practitioners, researchers and educators together to enable knowledge translation and the integration of research evidence into policy and practice.



What we want to achieve

By 2030, we want the value of a regional lens to be more widely acknowledged by those working at scales from the local to the international. To achieve this aim, we plan to:

Respond to the most compelling questions facing regions and societies, including those identified by influential organisations working at scales from the local to the international

Increase the availability of data for regional researchers by seizing the opportunities offered by open data and open science

Grow the visibility, readership, use and impact of RSA publications

Communicate arguments and evidence for the value of regional studies to policymakers, practitioners, the wider public and within academia

Work in partnership to ensure high-quality regional research drives and shapes public policy and professional practice

Strategic priority 2:

Strengthen regional research and knowledge networks

What RSA members tell us:

- The quality of relationships is widely described as the most valuable feature of the RSA and members experience the RSA as a supportive and approachable community. Relationships engender trust, thereby enabling the sharing and co-creation of knowledge, and over the long term the support of a like-minded community sustains people morally and psychologically. Networks - both formal and informal - provide the infrastructure that allow relationships to flourish. Wide networks also help reduce the risk of parochialism in regional research.
- Building professional networks can be particularly difficult for new entrants to the field and for those working in peripheral locations worldwide, including the global south. For some members, higher education funding constraints further limit opportunities for networking. For others, growing geopolitical conflicts are disrupting international collaborations, inhibiting cross border and inter-network exchanges. The RSA's ability to create and support networks and to create dialogue across international borders is highly valued, although there is a desire to strengthen the links between colleagues in the global north and south. More informal networking opportunities through RSA conferences and other activities would be welcomed, especially opportunities to connect with people of similar career stage or research interests.





What we want to achieve

By 2030, we want regional researchers, practitioners and policymakers across the world to have better access to RSA territorial, research or other networks that meet their needs. To achieve this, and to strengthen connections between RSA networks, we plan to:

Offer enhanced collaboration opportunities, including informal and online networking, through RSA events and as a benefit of RSA membership

Provide new RSA members with personalised support for building relationships and networks, with opportunities tailored to career stage, research or policy interests

Deliver enhanced support to students, ECRs and Regional Researchers-at-Risk to (re)build professional networks

Grow the number of RSA Research Networks (RNs) and Territorial Networks (TNs) with a focus on increasing the numbers participating in these networks and the collaborative opportunities across regions

Increase opportunities for networking and collaborating at the intersections of policy, practice and research

Strategic priority 3:

Grow and diversify the regional studies community

What RSA members tell us:

- Members view the scale and diversity of the regional studies community as strengths; its interdisciplinary nature and variety of perspectives is regarded as 'part of our DNA'. The Association is seen as being highly responsive to the diverse needs of its membership, although busy academics and professionals also find it challenging to keep informed about the full range of RSA benefits, or those activities most relevant to their work. As we build a global, inclusive and diverse community for regional research and development, members wish to see continued progress away from past UK or Eurocentric perspectives. The correction of structural inequalities through support for the work and careers of women and those working in underrepresented regions or the global south is also seen as a priority. Members highlight the support offered by the RSA to students and ECRs, and provided by its Women's Network, and would welcome support through these routes being further enhanced.





What we want to achieve

By 2030 we want the RSA to be regarded by all those engaged in regional studies or development as their professional home. Our plan is to:

Increase the RSA's total membership by recruiting new members while retaining current members

Tailor the member offer and member communications to the professional needs of individuals

Act inclusively and make all community members feel welcome and valued, regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, disability, religion or belief

Ensure member services can be accessed equitably and widen participation in grant schemes, conference presentations and publication authorship

Build representation across the Association, ensuring that those in decision-making positions reflect the diversity of our membership and the regional studies community

Strategic priority 4:

Contribute to a just and sustainable future

What RSA members tell us:

RSA members are deeply attuned to questions of social and environmental sustainability and possess significant expertise in sustainable development. Although they recognise the progress made in recent years, members want RSA services to be offered in ways that further reduce negative social and environmental impacts and for the work of the Association to contribute to a more just and sustainable future more broadly.

From a professional perspective, many members describe how building a career studying regions can be a precarious activity, and one increasingly under threat from budget constraints in higher education. These members would value career guidance and professional recognition from the RSA and – in some cases – advice on careers outside of academia. For others, intensifying workloads may in future squeeze the time available to contribute to RSA committees or other activities.



What we want to achieve

By 2030, we want the RSA to be operating in a more environmentally sustainable fashion, promoting the sustainable use of its services and providing its support towards just and green regional transitions. We also want the long-term future of the regional studies community to be secure, and for high quality education and career development provision to be available to all. We therefore plan to:

Take steps to mitigate our environmental impacts, including our carbon emissions

Grow the contribution of RSA research towards just and green regional transitions

Offer RSA members valuable career and professional development guidance appropriate to their needs

Support and supplement the education and professional development of regional researchers and practitioners

Make voluntary and other forms of contribution to the life of the Association more attractive and rewarding

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The RSA is one of the most globally engaged organisations in its approach to the world, giving us a distinctive opportunity to lead while serving as thoughtful stewards of the work ahead.

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Amy Glasmeier

President 2026-2027, Regional Studies Association.



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